

## Southwest Virginia Telemedicine Project (June 1, 2005)

Troutdale, Virginia

Today, I am pleased to visit Troutdale for the purpose of celebrating the establishment of a new telemedicine site at the Troutdale Medical Center which serves Grayson County residents.

For the past several years, I have encouraged community health clinics, health departments and local hospitals throughout the Ninth Congressional District to establish telemedicine sites connected to the University of Virginia's Hospital in Charlottesville and have worked closely with these facilities in requesting and obtaining hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal funding to support the telemedicine projects. Our work has been highly successful, and Southwest Virginia now boasts more than 50 broadband-connected telemedicine sites, more than any other Congressional District in the nation.

Telemedicine provides a means of obtaining diagnostic services and other forms of specialized care for patients in rural settings without the necessity of having to travel long distances to teaching hospitals and other centers which provide specialized medical care. Through advances in telecommunications technology, medical images, including X-rays, lab slides, CAT scans and magnetic resonance images can be transmitted across the telecommunications network. The specialized medical center receives the image with the same clarity that is contained in the original, and the specialist can render an opinion with the same degree of certainty as if he were viewing the original image.

This advance is tremendously beneficial for patients in rural settings who can avoid the time and expense associated with travel to the distant medical center. The patient can simply go to a clinic in his hometown that has telemedicine capability, and while he stays in the local examining room, the specialist located hundreds of miles away can do the examination and render a diagnosis. Telemedicine opens a new era of medical diagnosis and treatment which has previously been unavailable for many rural residents.

The telemedicine connection which has been established here at the clinic in Troutdale was made possible through a federal Community Development Block Grant in the amount of \$28,050. The grant funds have been administered through the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development and have been used to purchase and install a new computer, video conferencing equipment, television with VCR, monitor, electronic stethoscope, an ELMO document camera and a hand held digital camera for clinical imaging. The telemedicine connection with UVA's Hospital in Charlottesville is being provided through a high-speed T-1 data line.

In addition to receiving federal funds for the establishment of the telemedicine site, the Troutdale Medical Center will also benefit from federally mandated reduced telecommunications rates which are necessary for the Internet connection that enables the telemedicine link. At my urging, the Federal Communications Commission recently modified its rules regarding the Rural Health Care Support Mechanism program, a federal program which allows rural healthcare facilities to receive reduced rates for high-speed Internet connections and other broadband telecommunications services through the Universal Service Fund. As a result of the rule modification, the Troutdale Clinic will receive a federal Universal

Services Administration Grant which will reduce the facility's telecommunications costs in maintaining the telemedicine site by nearly \$500 per month.

I would like to say a word of thanks to a number of individuals who have been helpful in this stage of establishing a telemedicine link for the Troutdale Medical Center. Mayor William Mitchell and Town Manager Scott Booth have been tremendously supportive of our efforts in establishing this new telemedicine site, and I thank them for their leadership.

I also want to recognize Shirley Carter, Chairman of the Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems Board; the Board's Director Howard Chapman; Sally Pennings, Telemedicine Coordinator for all of Southwest Virginia Community Health System's facilities for the work they have done to make this project a reality.

At the University of Virginia, Dr. Karen Rheuban, a pediatric cardiologist and Medical Director of the Office of Telemedicine, has enthusiastically supported the establishment of our more than 50 site Southwest Virginia telemedicine project, and we are deeply indebted to her for the excellent work she has done.

I also want to thank Gene Sullivan, Director of Advanced Technology for the Health Sciences Center at the University of Virginia, for his essential technical assistance.

Finally, I want to recognize Megan Sullivan, the Family Nurse Practitioner at the Troutdale Clinic, who will be operating the telemedicine site. With the new services that are now enabled through the telemedicine link, Megan will now be performing an even greater service to the residents of this community, and I thank her for her efforts.

Working together, we have established an outstanding network of telemedicine sites throughout Southwest Virginia, and I am working to obtain the federal funding necessary to expand that network even further. One of my goals to advance health care is to bring closer the day when every Southwest Virginia resident can obtain diagnosis of medical problems by specialists located throughout the network with a simple visit to a local clinic. Today's celebration of the commencement of telemedicine service here at the Troutdale Medical Center marks an important step in that direction, and I congratulate all involved in achieving this success.